1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5



which he was a member.[1] In addition to this, recent changes in Hindu law, which apply to Coorgs also, have been such as to encourage individual acquisition at the expense of the *okka*.

The ancient custom of Coorgs recognized individual property only to a very limited extent, and that too only in movables. For instance, the younger members of an *okka* could cultivate, in the non-paddy season, and after they had contributed their daily quota of work to the joint estate, crops like ginger and turmeric. When these were sold a share was given to the *okka* for having provided the land on which they were grown.

The encouragement given to the ideas of partition and individual acquisition, the uprooting of Coorgs from their ancestral estates owing to the new political and economic structure stretching all over India, and the growing appeal of individualist ideas to the people, are all adversely affecting the solidarity of the *okka*. The elementary family, which was a weak entity in the traditional structure, is emerging with greater distinctness nowadays.

## IX

In a sense, only men are full members of the *okka*, but such rights as women do possess in it are of paramount importance to them, and the granting of these rights in the bridegroom's *okka* is the crucial point in the marriage ritual. The granting of rights to the bride in the groom's *okka* is accompanied by the severance of her connexion with her natal *okka*. But such severance is not complete and irrevocable. The entire process is symbolized in the transference of twelve pebbles from the bride's natal *okka* to her conjugal *okka*.

After marriage, then, a girl is a member of her conjugal *okka*, and her membership does not become extinct even if she becomes a widow. She is entitled to stay in her conjugal home and to be maintained out of its income. She has also the right to be buried after death in its burial-ground.

The bride is given membership in the groom's *okka*, and not rights in the groom's share in the ancestral property of his *okka*. The entire idea of an individual having a share in the ancestral property of his *okka* is a comparatively recent introduction into Coorg law. Traditionally, the immovable property of an *okka*

[1] G. Richter, *Manual of Coorg*, p. 130.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5



The two groups of kindred are brought together by the acquisition of two objects of common interest.

While the *mūrta* part of marriage refers to the creation of a new bond between two individuals and the kin-groups in which each of them is born, *sammanda* defines and clarifies the new structural situation which has come into existence. It brings home to the participants that a new legal situation has arisen, that an individual has been transferred from one *okka* to another. *Sammanda* ritual is performed whenever such a structural and legal alteration is brought about. (See 'Table of *Sammanda* Rights' on pp. 173–5.)

1. The *sammanda* ritual performed at *kanni mangala* ('marriage of a virgin'), which is, incidentally, the most frequent type of marriage performed, confers on the bride rights of membership in the groom's *okka*.

2. (*a*) When a widow wants to marry a brother of the late husband, no fresh *sammanda* need be performed as no new legal situation has come into existence. The girl is a member of the second husband's *okka* even before marriage and she continues to be one after marriage.

When a girl marries in the *kanni mangala* way she acquires rights of membership in the *okka* of her husband. This is a simple enough fact, but in recent years the acquisition of property by individuals for themselves and not for their *okkas* has confused the issue. A few educated Coorgs have tried to maintain that a girl, on marriage, acquires only a share in her husband's share of the ancestral property, and consequently, when a widow marries the husband's younger brother, a fresh *sammanda* has to be performed. This is absurd. The whole idea of individual ownership of immovable property is recent in Coorg, and even more important is the fact that *sammanda* is more than the acquisition of rights in property. It is the acquisition of membership in an *okka*, with all its consequences, social, economic, legal, and ritual.

(*b*) When a widow wants to marry someone who is not a member of her late husband's *okka*, she is first of all made to sever her connexion with it, and such severance restores her to her natal *okka*. She is then given *sammanda* in her second husband's house.

(*c*) The children of the widow are (usually) members of their *father's okka* except in certain cases which will be mentioned presently.

3. When a woman is divorced she loses her membership in her

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5



already and accompanied by the band of the bride's house. The leader of the groom's party is asked to cut down a row of six plantain stems, whereas other relatives are asked to cut down only a row of three stems. The bride's party is treated similarly at the groom's house later.

The fathers of the bride and groom do not meet at marriage. Within a year of the performance of the marriage the bride's natal *okka* invite the groom's father to a feast and the groom's *okka* invite the bride's father to a feast. This is known as 'knowing the relatives' (*bendu ariva*).

The formality which surrounds the relations of the affinal groups lessens with the years. The two groups concerned come together more and more as the years advance and children are born of the marriage. But the formality never totally disappears. Distance and respect may be said to characterize affinal relations for ever. The earlier occasions in which they come together are covered with ritual—ritual respect is scrupulously shown, feasts are given, and gifts are exchanged.

Respect should be shown to parents-in-law, and this is especially required from a girl towards her mother-in-law. A girl does not come very much into contact with her father-in-law, whereas she spends the best part of the day with her mother-in-law, working under the latter's supervision in or about the kitchen.

## XIII

The parents of a girl have a right to recover the presents of cloth and vessels which they gave their daughter at her marriage if the girl dies without leaving behind any children in her conjugal *okka*. But if children have been born of the marriage, the mother's personal property goes to them.

The legal position is not, however, as clear as we have made it out to be owing to the fact that lawyers trained in Hindu law have regarded the presents given to the bride by her natal *okka* as *stridhana* (woman's wealth), according to which the movable property presented to a bride by her relatives becomes her own property absolutely. If such an interpretation is accepted, the presents given by Coorg parents to their daughter at her wedding will come to be governed by the same laws as those prevailing among high-caste Hindus all over India. This seems to be another

3:Iyer E-5 (no date) 1948 AW5 Coorg AW5



596 [607] [173] [578] generally well guarded in the use of proper expressions in their talk with the young. The educated men of the present day exercise a potent influence for good in the normal conversation, and show due respect to their brother's wife with whom no familiarity is allowed. There is a tendency at present among the discontented members to break up the ancestral family by a division of the family property among the members.

### Property and Disposal

423 425 177 The property of the Coorgs consists chiefly of the ancestral house and the land belonging to it which under the Rajas was held on a feudal tenure and on a light assessment termed *jamma bhumi* or birthright land, because it was inalienably vested in the family or house, and the British Government confirmed the settlement. Additional land was taken up by them on the *sagu* tenure, but, in course of time, Government allowed to some extent such *sagu* land to be converted into *jamma* land. Other land held as jagir was granted for certain Government service as *umbli* land on a light assessment. During the last thirty years, many houses have opened out coffee plantations on their own or Government land, or rented cardamom jungles. Thus the actual wealth of the 434 421 Coorgs consists of landed property and their prosperity depends on the 596 exertions and means of cultivation; but imprudent enterprises and unexpected reverses have caused much embarrassment. Formerly, all the [556] members of a Coorg house lived together in the ancestral home or in some outfarm, *koppu*, neither of which could be alienated nor subdivided among the members of the family. All of them worked for the common good under the management of the *yajamana* or *karakara*, and had their subsistence on the proceeds. Any surplus on the annual reckoning became [433] the property of the house for providing incidental expenditure on the occasion of marriages, funerals, and other ceremonies, as also for the purchase of new land in the interest of the family. If, however, an individual member by becoming a salaried officer or by coming into possession of money through marriage, was enabled to enter upon private speculation without any aid from the ancestral house, any property or acquirements thus made became his private property and were left at his own disposal by gift or will. Many young men have thus become [591] separated from the ancestral house and established a new homestead, and as long as they contributed to the expenses of the former, they maintained [182] their share in the proceeds. This is the proper mode of setting up a new house. Disintegration is now setting in, and some try to break up the ancestral houses by a division of the landed property among the members.

### Adoption

597 The right of adoption is given to every Coorg house in the absence of male issue, or by an unmarried man or woman or widower in order to secure the inheritance of personal property or rights.